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RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1571
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6341
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0522
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3375
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 000465

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PARIS FOR DEA

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [EAGR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: SLIPPING TOWARDS ADDICTION: ALGERIA'S EVOLVING
DRUG PROBLEM

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas F. Daughton;
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Algeria is evolving from primarily a transit point for drugs entering Europe into a destination and producer of drugs. The first few months of 2008 have featured a wave of front-page press reports on domestic drug production, announcing that areas of the southern Sahel region are being used for the cultivation of "Afghan opium" poppy fields. Our government contacts tell us that drugs are becoming easier to find and drug use among the relatively young Algerian population is becoming more widespread, with use of harder drugs on the rise. The phenomenon is fueled by a social and economic situation that many feel is hopeless. The government is blaming an increase in illegal immigration through Algeria for the increase in drug usage by Algerian youth. The government nonetheless takes the drug problem seriously and efforts are underway to combat both distribution networks and the root causes of drug use among the population. A public awareness program and treatment facilities have been established to influence and treat those affected by drug use while our contacts tell us that law enforcement and border security agencies are actively engaged in stopping the production and flow of drugs through Algeria. Nonetheless, the implications of a more evolved domestic drug market and production capacity for smuggling and terrorist finance, particularly in the volatile Sahel region, are troubling. END SUMMARY.

THE EVOLVING CHALLENGE

12. (C) According to Aissa Kasmi, director of cooperation for the National Office for the Fight Against Drugs and Addiction (NOFDA), Algeria has historically been a transit point for drugs entering Europe from Africa. In the recent past Algerian drug usage was relatively insignificant, as the majority of drugs passed through Algeria northwards to more lucrative markets. As Algerian youth have gained more exposure to Western pop culture and enforcement efforts in Morocco have intensified, however, drug usage in Algeria has steadily increased. Kasmi told us March 31 that while cannabis was the primary drug of choice among youth in the past, Algerian officials have seen a shift towards use of designer drugs such as ecstasy and methamphetamines among the

teenage and twenty-something population and cocaine among the more privileged upper classes. Drug usage is now being observed among high school and even middle school children, according to Kasmi.

13. (C) Algeria has also long been a transit point for sub-Saharan Africans attempting to illegally immigrate to Europe. Kasmi charged that the increase in illegal immigration has negatively affected drug usage in Algeria, with many illegal immigrants transiting Algeria using drug sales to fund their passage to Europe. Algerian youth have become the new market for this phenomenon. The acceptance and use of newer and harder drugs among the youth population of Algeria can be attributed, he said, both to widespread unemployment coupled with a lack of hope for the future and to a sudden rise in disposable income among the upper classes. Among the latter, drug use tends to involve designer and hard drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy and heroin.

Among the poorer classes, drug use tends to be an escape from the day to day difficulties of life in Algeria, with use tending to focus on crack cocaine, cannabis and heroin. According to Kasmi, geographic availability also influences usage, with a higher concentration of cannabis use in the west of Algeria, pills and cocaine in the central and eastern provinces and hard drugs such as cocaine and heroin being used more in the south where poppies are grown, according to recent press reports.

NEW BUMPER CROPS IN THE SOUTH

14. (C) One of the relatively new and disturbing results of the new drug environment is the spread of opium poppy

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cultivation in the oases of the Sahel region of southwestern Algeria. Because of the difficulties farmers have had earning a living producing legitimate crops, many have turned to cultivating opium poppies or cannabis as a means to support themselves. According to Kasmi, one hectare of cannabis can generate approximately one billion dinars a year (approx USD 15.4 million). Kasmi noted that with the decline of the agricultural sector in Algeria and the increase of domestic demand for drugs, cultivation is quickly becoming a serious problem. In addition to the obvious social and criminal implications, widespread drug cultivation and use has serious security implications as well. Kasmi pointed to indications that terrorists are financing their operations through the use of drug money and he drew a parallel to the current situation in Afghanistan as an example of the dangerous symbiotic relationship between the drug trade and terrorism.

AN UPWARD TREND

15. (C) According to the NOFDA, in 2007 the Algerian Gendarmerie, police and customs services seized 16,595 kg of cannabis resin, 45 kg of cannabis, 20,987 cannabis plants and approximately 233,950 psychotropic pills such as ecstasy or methamphetamines. The government also seized 22.5 kg of cocaine, 53.92 grams of crack cocaine, 381 grams of heroin, 193.28 kg of opium poppy seeds and 74,817 opium poppy plants.

NOFDA state that in 2007 the Algerian government prosecuted 6,683 drug-related cases and approximately 9,874 people were involved in drug-related police investigations, including 102 foreigners. These statistics mark an extraordinary increase over the 2006 statistics reported in each category. For example, seizures of cannabis resin increased more than 65 percent from 2006 to 2007, cocaine seizures increased 185 percent, while heroin jumped a whopping 286 percent from 2006. The increases are most likely due to a combination of increased law enforcement efforts coupled with an increase in trafficking and usage. Statistics show that cannabis interdiction efforts resulted in a 531 percent increase in seizures from 2006 to 2007,

suggesting that border security and interdiction efforts have become both a higher priority and are increasingly more effective at disrupting the flow.

16. (C) In June 2003, NOFDA prepared a National Prevention Plan, which was implemented in 2004. The objective of the plan was to coordinate all aspects of the fight against drugs in order to combat the root causes of drug use as well as stopping the flow and sale of drugs. According to Kasmi, this two-pronged approach was designed to raise awareness of the serious health implications of drug use, similar to the "Just Say No" campaign seen in the United States in the mid-1980s. Harsh prison sentences and penalties for the trafficking and sale of drugs have been introduced since 2004, including the possibility of life imprisonment for certain drug offenses. Kasmi told us that 15 rehabilitation centers have recently been opened throughout Algeria to help treat those who are addicted. This is in addition to 53 intermediary centers, which offer therapy and counseling to those affected by addiction. A national media campaign involving posters, radio and television spots and targeted advertising focused primarily at children and young adults is in place to warn of the dangers of drug use.

COMMENT: A MOVING TARGET

17. (C) Algeria appears to be taking the evolving drug threat seriously and has recognized that the landscape is constantly shifting, as more public attention has focused on drug production in the southern part of the country. Programs to help those addicted and campaigns to educate and dissuade experimentation are in place. Harsh legal penalties along with active policing and interdictions are having an effect on the distribution of drugs as evidenced by the number of seizures. Conversely, however, the evolving drug problem also highlights the government's inability to address the

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root causes of demand, such as the lack of political and economic reform, high unemployment and a sense of hopelessness among the relatively young population. The implications of an increase in drug trafficking and production in Algeria for crime and terrorist financing in southern Algeria are also troubling.

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